

The Return of the Gladiators—A Meditation

The Second of the Series "Fighting the Devil in Modern Babylon"

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I ATTENDED the prize fight as the guest of one of the great newspaper syndicates to send out to its 600 papers a rebuke of the affair from the Christian standpoint, and to gather material for a sermon against it, in the fight that I have tried to wage against the devil in New York, modern Babylon. The event impressed me especially as an illustration of the fact that our moral progress seems completely to have stopped.

Victor Hugo once said, in his wonderfully eloquent way: "Progress is the stride of God." Through the inspiration of Christian ideals, we saw many magnificent strides forward in the moral progress of the race. Under the guidance of God, womanhood was freed, childhood was glorified, slavery was abolished, dueling was stopped, the Louisiana state lottery and other gambling were prohibited, and the bloody prize fight was outlawed in practically every American commonwealth.

But there were certain counter currents strongly operative which played on the inherent weakness of human nature, and these counter currents had begun to manifest themselves quite strongly even before the war. Then the war came along and knocked the props from beneath our moral idealism, and we shot down the broad way toward hell.

Every war, of necessity, is followed by a wave of immorality, for war is the supreme immorality. Naturally, therefore, the greatest war in the history of the race is now being followed by the widest wave of immorality that has ever swept the world. Only a silly and spurious optimism can deny the fact.

As a student of history, as well as an observer of contemporary thought and tendencies, I have been profoundly interested in watching the effect of this prize fight on the further development of our American life. We need to understand that such things as this prize fight do exert an enormous influence for the debauching of an entire people. Blood lust and the glorification of brute force feed on themselves, and if these tendencies, which are now triumphant in America, are allowed to continue unrebutted and unchecked, they will soon bring us back to the grossness of the Roman Empire at the time Christianity began to exert its beneficent influence.

The further these things go, the greater will be the tendency of the depraved taste of the easily moulded multitudes which follow after such things to demand something stiffer than a mere prize fight. Already, through the killings which have occurred, we are in sight of a return to an equivalent of the gladiatorial shows of Rome, in which human beings were murdered as a pastime for the multitudes.

Not only will our men be debauched, but our women also, as is clearly indicated by the attendance of more than 5,000 women at the recent fight. Our society belles of that coming day—the descendants of the "smart set" of today, who attended the Dempsey-Carpentier meet—shorn of all womanly delicacy and gentleness, will gloat with their male consorts in the fever of the blood lust, and they will turn down their jeweled thumbs as a sign that the defeated gladiators in the arena before them must die!

Such things as the return of the Roman Arena are not at all impossible for the near future in our country. Historians tell us that when the gladiatorial combats

first started in Rome, they were comparatively mild affairs, with dummy weapons and two or three pairs of gladiators furnishing the entertainment for the day. But by the time of Julius Caesar much larger numbers were being used, and they were fighting to the finish. Then, when the republic, with its more humane ideals, passed, and the empire, with its glorification of brute force, supplanted it, the passion for the arena steadily increased, and the battles became bloodier and more fatal. We learn from Horace and Persius that in their day 100 pairs of gladiators were the "fashionable number" for private entertainments. By the time of Titus, shows were in vogue which lasted 100 days, and Trajan, we are told, celebrated his triumph over Decabalus with an entertainment in which 5,000 pairs of gladiators fought. They had regular pitched battles in the arena, in which scores of men on either side fought to the death.

So degraded did these public exhibitions become that Domitian, at the Saturnalia of A. D. 90, arranged a battle between male dwarfs and women, and all are familiar with the terrible injustice and degeneracy that led to the revolt of the gladiators under the heroic leadership of the Thracian Spartacus.

The passion for play as an end in itself, the love of luxury, the glorification of brute force, the decay of the family and home ideals, neglect of the church and desecration of the Sabbath day, crowned by such things as this bloody prize fight and the insane movement for huge armaments, will finally lead us into a moral quagmire within another generation in America, unless these things are definitely checked and overthrown by a revival of real religion and a return to the old American ideals.

One cannot fail to fear for the influences of this degrading affair which we are considering upon the youth of our country. Not only did I notice gambling among small boys before the fight; and not only did I hear an excessive amount of shocking profanity and obscene language before, during and after the fight, but, while one of the preliminary bouts was in progress—a brutal and bloody fight between two men—little girls, mere children, passed through the crowd taking up a collection for a Jersey City Hospital!

And the motion pictures of this fight have been sent throughout the nation and around the world, to parade Dempsey before the eyes of our youth as a great hero!

Think of the influence which will be exerted on the standards of success of the growing generation by the strongly emphasized fact, in connection with these pictures, that Dempsey received \$300,000 for that one fight! Three hundred thousand dollars for less than a half hour's brutal work, while the President of the United States receives only about the same amount in return for four years of arduous and wearing labor!

I wish that my readers might consider calmly the significance of the presence of large numbers of church men and women at that ring side. It illustrates the fact

that multitudes of church people have surrendered completely to worldliness and self-indulgent pleasure.

The culmination of this whole disgraceful tendency has been reached in the attendance of a multitude of church women at the Dempsey-Carpentier mill. They deserve the sternest and most scathing rebuke. Think of women, whose influence is worldwide because of their wealth and position—women who belong to the church and who come to the communion table—think of such women, I say, sitting at a ring side watching and applauding two men pounding and bruising each other and struggling in sweat and blood until one was beaten down by the cunning and the sheer weight of the other!

Have these women, and the church men also, who attended this prize fight, forgotten their spiritual heredity, as well as their Christian ideals in the living present? The early Christians were often in the arenas of paganism and heathenism, but always as victims and never as witnesses of the brutality and butchery that made such a popular holiday!

To sum it all up, the outstanding impression that this fight and everything connected with it made on my mind, as already hinted, was that the whole thing was a glorification of the principles of paganism, which are utterly alien to the Christian ideals and the origin and genius of our noble land. Paganism is the exaltation of the flesh above the spirit, the supremacy of matter over mind. It is the apotheosis of the soulless and the sensuous, and its growth means the supplanting of Christian ideals by idolatry, the worship of mammon, the glorification of brute power, and the passion for "pleasure."

There is no magic in America to preserve us from the results of the sins and follies that have wrecked other great peoples before us. As I see these deadly forces that have destroyed every people of the past who have surrendered to them—as I now see these forces of worldliness and godlessness and sin menacing this beautiful America of ours with all her matchless promise and all her meaning to the world, and as I see already our boys and girls being swept down to destruction by these forces, I feel like crying out with old Jeremiah: "Oh that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!"

Most humbly and yet most earnestly I appeal to the people for a return to the realities of religion and the splendid strength of old-time Americanism. I appeal for a return to the old fashion. I appeal against all those who violate the Ten Commandments and despise the Sermon on the Mount. I appeal for a return to the stern and splendid ideals of true Americanism. I appeal for those simple and yet sublime forces which made our fathers great and our mothers good, which put service above self, manhood above money and God above gold—the forces which made duty instead of pleasure the real motive of life, which repudiated the Epicurean maxim, "Dum vivimus, vivamus," which, instead of the easy-going "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die," said rather, "Arise and stand upon your feet, gird on your armor, strive for the eternal right, and follow those sublime and heavenly ideals which constitute at last the true life of man!"



Mount Tacoma from Spanaway Lake near Tacoma.